

The Tractarian Doctrine of Relations

Wittgenstein's Resolute Resolution of Russell's Puzzle of Asymmetric Relations

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Consider proposition 4.22 of the *Tractatus*:

4.22 An elementary proposition consists of names. It is a nexus, a concatenation of names.¹

This proposition gives rise to the question of whether or not there are, within the Tractarian picture of language, names for relations. If there aren't, the Tractarian conception must be such that existence of states of affairs wherein certain objects stand in particular *relations* to one another is expressible by means of propositions that do not contain names for those particular relations.

¹All English quotations from the *Tractatus* are from Wittgenstein, Ludwig *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness. London and New York: Routledge, 2001, Routledge Classics

Approached from 4.22 alone, the first alternative, according to which there are names for relations, seems most natural. Under this view, the Tractarian propositions that express relational facts consist of concatenations of the names of the objects and the names of the relations that are involved in the relevant relational facts. The fact that Cassio loves Desdemona, would be expressed by the Tractarian proposition: Cassio loves Desdemona, conceived of as a concatenation of the constants (i.e. of the Tractarian names) "Cassio," "Desdemona" and "love."

This is the most natural option because the alternative, according to which there aren't any Tractarian names for relations, requires an account of the expressibility of relational facts by propositions which consist only of names of things, and which contain no names for relations, even though in natural languages, in standard systems of logic, and also in those systems with which Wittgenstein was best acquainted (Frege's *Begriffsschrift* and Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*), relational facts are expressed by propositions which do contain relational constants.

This dismissal of the view that there aren't Tractarian names for relations on the basis of its unnaturalness is, however, too quick. The issue raised by 4.22 turns out to be somewhat more delicate. The natural view that there are names for relations, conjoined with proposition 3.22 of the *Tractatus*, also comes at a costly price:

3.22 In a proposition a name is the representative of an object.

The view that there are Tractarian names for relations commits us, by

3.22, to the view that relations are Tractarian objects. But for those with a taste for ontological delicacy, a reification of relations may be too gross a bite to take in. It would imply, for instance, that the world is not only made up of space-shuttles, tiny walls and politicians; the distance that separates you and the person currently sitting closest to you, as well as the philosophical-disagreement that binds all members of the philosophical community together, would also have to be regarded as objects.²

Moreover, this view is not merely in conflict with minimalist preferences. One may reify relations and still regard them as ontologically distinct from objects. By 3.22, however, what the view that there are Tractarian names for relations commits us to is the claim that within the Tractarian framework, there is no ontological distinction between things

²This is, notably, Ricketts case. See Ricketts, *Thomas Pictures, logic, and the limits of sense*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Wittgenstein*. Cambridge University Press, 1996 pp. 69 *et seq.*

Although this paper is inspired and motivated by Ricketts's, I shall not launch a detailed attack against his arguments. This would take us too far afield to a range of issues concerning picturing and modeling that, due to formal constraints, I'm not able to deal with here. Generally, what I take to be the main sources of the problems with Ricketts's paper on the subject of the status of relations in the *Tractatus* are: (1) Too simplistic a picture of Wittgenstein's views on relations during the years of composition of the *Tractatus*: Ricketts's seems to work under the assumption that Wittgenstein had an answer to the question of the status of relations from the outset. The 1914-1916 notebooks suggest this was not the case. (2) Ricketts's arguments rely too heavily on the case of modeling of spatial relations by spatial relations between symbols. (3) A misunderstanding of Wittgenstein's solution of Russell's problem of asymmetric relations. (4) Ricketts's position is motivated by a misreading of some propositions of the *Tractatus*, in particular of 2.03 ("In a state of affairs objects fit into one another like the links of a chain") and of 3.1432 ("Instead of, 'The complex sign "aRb" says that *a* stands to *b* in the relation *R*,' we ought to put, 'That "*a*" stands to "*b*" in a certain relation says that *aRb*'"), and this forces him to misread other propositions, like 4.22.

In section 2 below I provide a somewhat detailed criticism of these misreadings.

and the relations holding between them. The ontology we're thereby committed to is both bloated and coarse. It is the coarse grained ontology that fails to make distinctions between relations (of varying arities) and things.

Even leaving questions of ontological taste aside, there remains a reason one may have to reject the idea that in the *Tractatus*, there are names for relations, and thus that relations are Tractarian objects. One may think that such a reading takes the *Tractatus* as a metaphysical treatise, or at least that it saddles Wittgenstein with robust metaphysical claims. While not every reader of the *Tractatus* will come under the grip of this worry, every resolute reader should.

In short, 3.22 and 4.22 together yield the following dilemma:

RD The Relation's Dilemma - Either there are Tractarian names for relations, in which case relations are Tractarian objects, or there are no Tractarian names for relations, in which case relational facts ought to be expressible by Tractarian propositions which do not contain any terms for relations.

Thomas Ricketts has defended the second alternative, which I shall sometimes refer to as the No-Relations view:

Russell takes relations to be a type of thing – they are constituents of facts, objects of acquaintance, and the designata of names; they may themselves have properties and be the relata of still further relations. All this is what

the reality of relations comes to for him. So conceived, Wittgenstein rejects the reality of relations, Russell's most cherished ontological thesis. Relations are not things, are not entities; relations cannot be labeled or designated. Unlike "a" and "b," "R" is not a symbol in "aRb." Instead, roughly put, the holding of a relation over objects is symbolized by the holding of a relation over the names of those objects. But this way of talking is itself misleading for its use of "object" and "relation" as a contrasting pair of common nouns. [...]

On this interpretation, then, relations are not among the simple objects of the 2.0's. Elementary sentences represent (*darstellen*) atomic facts. An atomic fact is a combination of objects in which the objects are related in a definite way, in which the objects "hang together in each other like the links of a chain" (2.03). In the analogy between atomic facts and chains, Wittgenstein rejects Russell's view of relations as ontological atoms that have the role of joining other ontological atoms together into complexes.

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In the course of the paper, I will argue that this is a misinterpretation of Wittgenstein's position and defend the alternative. Ricketts's reading has the merit of being a resolute reading of the *Tractatus*, one which does not take it as a metaphysical treatise that 'shows' ineffable truths that 'cannot be said,' and I suspect that Ricketts is in part motivated to adopt the No-Relations view because he thinks this is required by a resolute reading. Part of what I shall be arguing is that reading the *Tractatus* resolutely does not require denying that relations are Tractarian objects.

The first section is a preliminary. It is a discussion of the Tractarian ontology of the 1's and the early 2's, and of the way in which this ontology is derivative of Wittgenstein's views of language, presented in the basic theory of linguistic representation of the 3's. In the second section I raise some objections to the No-Relations reading of the *Tractatus*. The third

³Ricketts p. 72

section is a discussion of the connection between Russell and Wittgenstein's opposite strategies and solutions to Russell's Puzzle of asymmetric relations. Since the claim that relations are Tractarian objects raises the issue of resoluteness, I will end the paper with a few remarks on this topic.

1 Remarks on Tractarian Ontology

Since the overall aim is to show that relations are Tractarian objects, the natural route to take is an examination of Tractarian metaphysics, and in particular of the Tractarian conception of object and of its place within Tractarian ontology.

1.1 An Ontology of Facts (Not of Things)

Tractarian ontology gravitates around the notion of facts. That this is so is clear from the 1's. Why this is so requires some speculation, but we needn't look too far. As is made clear by 1.1, by the proposition that "*The world is the totality of facts, not of things,*" the relevant alternative to an ontology of facts is an ontology of things. The question why Wittgenstein chose an ontology of facts is thus to be understood as the question why he chose such an ontology over an ontology of things.

The answer is that the *Tractatus* is a treatise on logic. As such, its central topic or axis of interest is truth (and falsehood). Tractarian ontology

is an ontology of facts because as an ontology informed by the *Tractatus*'s logical concern for truth, its central notion is the notion that is more relevant to questions of truth, and that is the notion of fact.

The notion of fact is more relevant to questions of truth than the notion of thing because questions of truth raise at the level of facts and not at the level of things. Truth, that is, is a feature of judgements or propositions, which are about facts, and only bear on things by being about facts.

This reading is supported by some of Wittgenstein's remarks in the 1914–1916 notebooks:

Logic is interested only in reality. And thus in sentences ONLY in so far as they are *pictures* of reality.

But how CAN a single *word* be true or false? At any rate it cannot express the *thought* that agrees or does not agree with reality. That *must* be articulated.

A single word cannot be true or false in *this* sense: it cannot agree with reality, or the opposite.

While in this passage Wittgenstein takes as his point of departure logic in order to raise a question about *language* (about the basic linguistic unit of interest to logic) rather than about ontology, a similar line of reasoning may be applied when thinking about ontology, by raising the question of what the basic ontological unit relevant for logic is.

Evidence that this was the line of reasoning followed by the Wittgenstein that developed the ontology of the *Tractatus* is found in Desmond Lee's notes,⁴ where Wittgenstein's comments on propositions 1.1 and 1.12

⁴Wittgenstein Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1932

of the *Tractatus* are reported as follows:

1.12. "For the totality of facts determines both what is the case, and also all that is not the case". This is connected with the idea that there are elementary propositions, each describing an atomic fact, into which all propositions can be analysed.⁵

Note the transition from the ontological to the linguistic register, the 'connection' between 1.12 and 'a certain logical idea.' The idea is that there are elementary propositions into which all propositions can be analyzed, and each of these describes a fact. This suggests that if we analyze all true propositions into elementary propositions, we get descriptions of the facts, of all the facts there are. Thus a logical idea leads to an idea of the world, to an ontology according to which the world, which is what determines which elementary propositions are true and which are false, is to be conceived of as the totality of atomic facts.

As the commentary on 1.1 shows, this insight is gained by observing aspects of language and the way it works:

1.1 "The world is the totality of facts and not of things". What the world is is given by description and not by a list of objects. So words have no sense except in propositions, and the proposition is the unit of language.⁶

⁵Wittgenstein Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1932 p. 119.

⁶Wittgenstein Wittgenstein's Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1932 p. 119.

Wittgenstein adds, immediately, "This is an erroneous idea". That the idea seemed erroneous for Wittgenstein in 1930–1931 obviously does not imply that it did not seem right to the Wittgenstein that published the *Tractatus*, or to the pre-*Tractatus* Wittgenstein that engaged in questions of ontology (the lack of sense of which questions the Wittgenstein that published the *Tractatus* aimed at exposing in publishing the *Tractatus*).

Wittgenstein's reasoning goes from the way the world is given linguistically (by description) to the way the world is (to what we are to say, within the *Tractatus*, that the world is). That the world is given in descriptions, not in lists of objects, shows that the proposition is the basic unit of language, not names. This in turn is captured on the ontological register by 1.1, by a conception of the world as the totality of facts and not of things. That Tractarian ontology is an ontology of facts is a consequence of the logical orientation that guides it and of the conception of language that informs it.

1.2 What is an Ontology of Facts?

But what exactly is an ontology of facts? What, if any, are the substantive issues at stake in the choice of facts over things as basic ontological units? The claim that Tractarian ontology is an ontology of facts is the claim that to the epistemic priority of descriptions over lists of objects and to the linguistic priority of propositions over isolated words corresponds an ontological priority of facts over objects. The context principle has its image on the ontological and on the epistemological registers.

Objects do not exist independently of the facts in which they *actually* occur. Objects cannot be thought of independently of the facts in which they *might* occur. It is the notion of fact that first comes into view, and it is against the backdrop of the notion of fact that the rest of Tractarian ontology is structured. In particular, within the context of such an ontology,

the notion of object, of thing, will be derivative of (subordinated to) the notion of fact. What Tractarian objects are is determined by the role they ought to play in an ontological framework within which all there is are facts, and by nothing else. The notion of a Tractarian object is exhausted by the answer to the question: What ought objects be like in order to be able to figure in facts as their constituents. Now, what does this claim amount to?

1.3 The 2.0's – The Tractarian Conception of Object

It is in the 2s, and particularly in the 2.0s, which mark the transition from Tractarian ontology to the pictorial theory of representation, that Wittgenstein develops the notion of object that is required by a logically driven ontology of facts:

2 What is the case—a fact—is the existence of states of affairs.

2.01 A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things).

Within Tractarian economy, 'states of affairs,' 'possibility,' and 'object' are interdependent notions, all determined by and large by the working conception of fact that results from the *Tractatus's* logical orientation.

The notion of states of affairs is a requisite for logic because logic is not only concerned with truths, but also with falsehoods. Thus if we adopt a logical point of view and take propositions as our starting point,

then the source of the need for non-existing states of affairs or negative facts becomes clear:

[2.06] “The existence and non-existence of states of affairs is reality.

(We also call the existence of states of affairs a positive fact, and their non-existence a negative fact.)”

Propositions may be true or false; states of affairs are just what enable us to *make sense* of false propositions, to see their contentfulness, to see that they are propositions that point at (whose sense is) what is not (but might have been) the case. Facts, existing states of affairs, are what correspond to true propositions. Non-existing states of affairs, the negative facts of 2.06, are what correspond to false propositions. The subject matter of logic, it’s topic, the reality with which it deals, is the totality of (existing and non-existing) states of affairs: “*Logic deals with every possibility and all possibilities are its facts.*” [2.0121]⁷

⁷Note, in passing, that in the context of 2.0121 an ambiguity is introduced in the notion of fact. To say that all states of affairs are the facts of logic is not to say that all states of affairs are facts in the sense of the 1s. It is to say that logic is concerned with all states of affairs, and not only with existing states of affairs. That is the simplest and most straightforward way of putting it. A more subtle understanding is gained, however, by considering propositions like 1.12 and 2.05, to the effect that existing states of affairs, or facts, determine also what is not the case:

1.12 For the totality of facts determines what is the case, and also whatever is not the case.

[...] 2.05 The totality of existing states of affairs also determines which states of affairs do not exist.

1.4 From the Factual to the Possible

What is the case determines what is not the case, and thereby the whole space of possibilities, logical space, in the following way. In the previous section I mentioned that the context principle has an image on the ontological and epistemological registers. The ontological homologue is that objects do not exist independently of the facts in which they actually occur; the epistemological homologue that objects cannot be thought of independently of the facts in which they might occur. Having introduced the notion of states of affairs, we may now rephrase as follows: objects *do not exist* independently of the facts, that is, independently of the *existing states of affairs* in which they *are* combined with other objects; and objects *are not thinkable* independently of the *states of affairs* in which they *can* occur.⁸

What bridges the gap between the space of actuality (of facts) and the space of possibility (of states of affairs, existing and not) is the form of objects. “Form” is just the name that is given in the *Tractatus* to the possibilities internal to an object of combining with other objects in states of affairs: “The possibility of its occurring in states of affairs is the form of an object” [2.0141].

⁸Wittgenstein points out the connection between the dependence of objects on facts and the context principle in the parenthetical remark in 2.0122: (“It is impossible for words to appear in two different roles: by themselves and in propositions.”) This is followed by a formulation of what I am calling the epistemological homologue of the context principle in 2.0123: “If I know an object I also know all its possible occurrences in states of affairs.”

That objects have form is a matter of necessity: “In logic nothing is accidental: if a thing *can* occur in a state of affairs, the possibility of that state of affairs must be written into the thing itself” [2.012]. This is the point of the 2.01s. Objects exist only as components of facts, as constituents of facts, and facts are just one kind of states of affairs – the kind of states of affairs that happen to exist. Trivially, that objects figure in (existing) states of affairs implies that objects can figure in those states of affairs. But somewhat less trivially, that an object can figure in a certain existing state of affairs also implies that it can figure in other, non-existing states of affairs.

An object, we’ve seen, can combine with other objects in a state of affairs by virtue of it’s having a form. The notion of form is the link between the actual and the possible. It links existing objects and non-existing states of affairs. In Wittgenstein’s words, form is the possibility of structure:

2.031 In a state of affairs objects stand in a determinate relation to one another.

2.032 The determinate way in which objects are connected in a state of affairs is the structure of the state of affairs.

2.033 Form is the possibility of structure.

So in order for an object to be a component of an existing state of affairs, it must have form. But by virtue of it’s having the form it has, it is also possible for it to form part of other (non-existing) states of affairs.

That you and the piece of paper you have in front of you figure in the fact *that this piece of paper is in front of you*, implies, for sure, that it *can* figure in *that* fact. The possibility of it standing in this spatial relation to you is essential to it [2.011]⁹ or written on it [2.012],¹⁰ it is part of it's form [2.033].¹¹ But its being the kind of thing that can stand in this spatial relation to you, it's having *that* form, is not different to it's being the kind of thing that can stand in (this and thereby in) other spatial relations to (this and) other things.

The transition from actuality to possibility, from facts to states of affairs, is thus accomplished via the notion of form as the internal or essential possibilities that each object has of entering into 'determinate relations' [2.032]¹² or 'combinations' with other objects and thereby form structured states of affairs. This, ultimately, is the sense in which what is the case determines what is not the case [2.05].¹³ It is in this way that the notions of 'states of affairs', 'possibility', 'object' and 'form' are interdependent.

⁹[2.011] It is essential to things that they should be possible constituents of states of affairs.

¹⁰[2.012] In logic nothing is accidental: if a thing *can* occur in a state of affairs, the possibility of the state of affairs must be written into the thing itself.

¹¹[2.033] Form is the possibility of structure.

¹²[2.032] The determinate way (*Art und Weise*) in which objects are connected in a state of affairs is the structure of the state of affairs.

¹³[2.05] The totality of existing states of affairs also determines which states of affairs do not exist.

1.5 The 2.1's — The Pictorial Theory of Linguistic Representation

From the 2.1's onwards, Wittgenstein begins the exposition of the pictorial view of representation. The essential notion is that of modeling. A picture is an (existing) state of affairs [2.141]¹⁴ consisting of certain elements arranged in a certain way, in a certain *structure* which Wittgenstein calls *the pictorial form* of the picture [2.15].¹⁵ Each of the elements of the picture represents an object of the depicted state of affairs [2.13].¹⁶ It is because a picture's pictorial form has the same structure as the state of affairs that it depicts, and because each of the elements of the picture stands for each of the objects that are combined in the state of affairs that it depicts, that a picture depicts *that* state of affairs [2.17].¹⁷ In this sense, the notion of picture involves, beyond the elements of the picture and the pictorial form in which they are arranged, the pictorial relationship between the picture and the depicted state of affairs [2.1513], [2.1514].¹⁸

The Tractarian theory of linguistic representation is the application of the pictorial theory of representation to the particular case of linguistic

¹⁴[2.141] A picture is a fact.

¹⁵[2.15] The fact that the elements of a picture are related to one another in a determinate way represents that things are related to one another in the same way. Let us call this connection of its elements the structure of the picture, and let us call the possibility of this structure the pictorial form of the picture.

¹⁶[2.13] In a picture objects have the elements of the picture corresponding to them.

¹⁷[2.17] What a picture must have in common with reality, in order to be able to depict it—correctly or incorrectly—in the way it does, is its pictorial form.

¹⁸[2.1513] So a picture, conceived in this way, also includes the pictorial relationship, which makes it into a picture.

[2.1514] The pictorial relationship consists of the correlations of the pictures elements with things.

representation.

A propositional sign is a fact consisting of certain elements (names) standing in a determinate relation [*bestimmte Art und Weise*] to one another [3.14].¹⁹ The names occurring in propositions mean or stand for the objects that are combined in the state of affairs represented by the proposition [3.2], [3.201], [3.202], [3.203].²⁰ The determinate way in which the simple signs or names of a propositional sign relate to one another is its structure. A proposition shares its structure with the state of affairs it represents [3.21]²¹ (with the thought it expresses). *This* is how a proposition can represent a fact.

¹⁹[3.14] What constitutes a propositional sign is that in it its elements (the words) stand in a determinate relation to one another.

A propositional sign is a fact."

I should indicate that I am simplifying for the sake of brevity. Not all propositions of all languages consist of sets of names standing in a particular relation to one another. There are languages that contain no such propositions (e.g. English), and there are languages that contain such propositions, but which also contain propositions which contain more than names (e.g. standard first order logic). Suffice it here to say that Wittgenstein says that this *can* be the case. That there is a language whose propositions are just as the ones described is.

²⁰[3.2] In a proposition a thought can be expressed in such a way that elements of the propositional sign can be expressed in such a way that elements of the propositional sign correspond to the objects of the thought.

[3.201] I call such elements 'simple signs,' and such a proposition 'completely analysed.'

[3.202] The simple signs employed in propositions are called names.

[3.203] A name means an object. The object is its meaning. ('A' is the same sign as 'A').

²¹[3.12] The configuration of objects in a situation corresponds to the configuration of simple signs in the propositional sign.

2 Relations *are* Objects

In the introduction we saw that the question of whether there are Tractarian names for relations leads to the relations dilemma RD: Either there are Tractarian names for relations, in which case by 3.22, the Tractarian claim that in propositions names stand for objects, relations *are* Tractarian objects, *or* there are no names for relations, and relations are not Tractarian objects.

Ricketts avoids the metaphysically exuberant claim that relations are Tractarian objects by denying that there are Tractarian names for relations. In this section, I argue that that is a mistake. The main reason, as we shall shortly see, is that names for relations are not eliminable from languages without considerable loss of expressive power. A language that contains no names for relations is not a language in which all states of affairs can be stated. In addition, the texts seem to speak in favor of the alternative: there *are* Tractarian names for relations, and relations *are* Tractarian objects.

2.1 A Problem for Partisans of the No-Relations View

Begin by considering what the candidates to play the role of expressions of relational facts and which do not contain names for relations could be. Take, for instance, the relation commonly referred to by the phrase: "... is the father of ...". Since this is a binary relation, a relational fact

involving this relation will contain at least two objects. On any reading of the *Tractatus*, the fact *that Robert is the father of Thomas* involves *at least* the two objects Robert and Thomas.²² The challenge that the partisan to the claim that relations are not Tractarian objects has to meet is that of devising a notation such that the propositional sign for the atomic fact that Robert is the father of Thomas (and generally for all atomic relational facts) contains only the names “Robert,” “Thomas” (and, generally, names for the kind of things that enter into relations).

How could a propositional sign that consists *only* of the names of Robert and Thomas express the fact that Robert is Thomas’s father? Note that not only sentences that contain more names are ruled out. Sentences that contain expressions other than names are also ruled out. The analysis of sentences like “Robert is the father of Thomas” that the partisan of the view that there are no Tractarian names for relations requires is one according to which the sentence consists *solely* of two names arranged in a certain structure. That this is a requisite follows from 4.22, the proposition that opened this paper: “An elementary proposition consists of names. It is a nexus, a concatenation of names.”

Ricketts proposes an analysis according to which the sentence “a en-

²²Insofar as what kind of things count as Tractarian simples is not at all clear, this claim is false. The important point, however, is not about this particular sentence. The point is just about any arbitrary elementary proposition expressing the fact that a binary relation holds between two simples (whatever those make look like). I use this sentence as an example because it is convenient, and ask the reader to bear on mind that it does not depend on any particular interpretive thesis about what things count as Tractarian simples.

vies b" contains two names, and something else:

Can we think of elementary sentences on the model of "a envies b," as I have been urging? 4.22 states that an elementary sentence consists of names. I have insisted that "*a envies b*" has only two names.²³ There thus are more than names in this putative elementary sentence. Is my interpretation consistent with 4.22? Here we must remember that sentences are facts: the sentence in question is "a" 's ENVY-left-flanking "b." This fact is a chaining together of names in a way entirely analogous to the way in which the state of affairs of a's envying b is a combination of objects.²⁴

Ricketts himself points out that this raises a question about the consistency of that analysis with 4.22. The problem stems from the compatibility of the two following claims:

1. *Just Names*: [4.22] " An elementary proposition consists of names. It is only a concatenation of names"
2. *Two Names Analysis*: There are only two names combined in "a envies b"

In the face of this problem, it is of little use to point out that " "a envies b" has only two [Tractarian] names," and that there is no problem with this because the fact *that a envies b* contains only two objects. What is at stake is whether the fact that *a envies b* contains two or whether it contains three Tractarian objects. An *argument* showing that an analysis of "a envies b" according to which it contains only two names is (1) viable

²³My emphasis.

²⁴Ricketts p. 76.

and (2) coherent with the *Tractatus* would establish the plausibility of Ricketts's reading. The un-argued for claim that that is the right analysis, coupled with the claim that the fact contains only two objects, is question-begging.

As we just saw, the plausibility of Ricketts's reading requires an argument to the effect that the *Two Names* analysis is viable. Since "a envies b" contains three expressions, such an analysis can take two forms. Either it analyzes "a envies b" into a Tractarian proposition that contains two Tractarian names and no other expressions, or it analyzes it into a Tractarian proposition that contains two Tractarian names and something else. The first option requires supplementation by an indication of how a language could give expression to all binary atomic relational facts through propositions that contained *only* two names. The second option requires supplementation by a defense of a reading of 4.22, according to which that proposition does not express what it seems to express, namely that "An elementary proposition consists of names, it is a nexus, a concatenation of names," but instead gives expression to what it seems to deny, namely that an elementary proposition consists of names *and other expressions*, that a proposition is a nexus or a concatenation of names *and also of expressions of other kinds*.

The first option can be quickly ruled out. The idea is that Tractarian propositions into which first order logic atomic sentences of the form "aRb" are analyzed contain only two names. In this case, the Tractar-

ian proposition corresponding to “a envies b” contains only a name for the thing named by “a” and one for the thing named by “b;” no names for relations or for anything else. Surely, in this case, the language of the Tractatus turns out to have very little expressive power. It is able to express relational facts involving only one kind of relation (say, either the father-son relation or the sibling relation, not both).²⁵ I consider the second option in the next section.

2 4.22 Elementary Propositions Consist of Names... (... but not only?)

I have been suggesting that 4.22 commits us to an analysis of elementary propositions of the form aRb as containing three Tractarian names, on pains of considerable loss of expressive power. The suggestion is based on a reading of 4.22 according to which it states that Tractarian propositions consist *only* of names. In the face of this, the partisan of the view that there are no Tractarian names for relations may propose an alternative reading of 4.22, one that is compatible with the *Two Names* analysis of “a

²⁵Ricketts attempts to give examples of languages that express differential relations of pitch in sounds by relative position on a page along its vertical orientation, and relative positions of things in space by relative distribution of symbols in a notational framework. That shows, *at best*, that it is possible to devise notations which do not contain any relational constants but in which relational facts involving *a relation of one particular kind* (e.g. difference in pitch, *or* (exclusive) relative position in space, etc.) can be expressed. What is required, however, is an argument to the effect that it is possible to devise a language in which there are no symbols for relations but *in which all atomic relational facts are expressible*.

envis b," but which leaves room for there being expressions other than names in the Tractarian proposition expressing that *a* envies *b*.

This is the strategy commended by Ricketts in a footnote at the end of the passage in which he proposes the two names analysis, which passage I quoted above. The footnote reads:

I take 4.24 to support this interpretation. It may help to ease textual qualms to observe here that while elementary sentences consist of names, not every expression in an elementary sentence is a name. Indeed, the notion of an expression introduced at 3.31 leads to an understanding of quantification that permits quantification into the position occupied by relational predicates.²⁶

I will argue that this reading of 4.22 is highly implausible. First, and trivially, it makes the presence of 4.22 in the *Tractatus* considerably inexplicable. If, as Ricketts's reading suggests, by "An elementary proposition consists of names. It is a nexus, a concatenation of names" Wittgenstein means that elementary propositions sometimes consist of concatenations of names, and sometimes consist of concatenations of names with expressions that are not names, then it is quite difficult to understand the point of explicitly endorsing a view that everyone takes for granted (that the category 'name' is not the only grammatical or logico-syntactic category), and it is even more difficult to understand the point of choosing, for the purpose of expressing that widely accepted presupposition, a formulation that suggests the exact opposite. Second, the texts indicated by

²⁶Ricketts p. 98.

Ricketts, 4.24 and 3.31, do not lend support to Ricketts's reading. Third, there's further textual evidence that directly contradicts his reading of 4.22.

2.1 The Texts: 4.24

Consider 4.24 first:

4.24 Names are simple symbols: I indicate them by single letters ('x', 'y', 'z').

I write elementary propositions as functions of names, so that they have the form 'fx' $\varphi(x, y)$, etc.

Or I indicate them by the letters 'p', 'q', 'r'.²⁷

We can grant that at a first glance, 4.24 would seem to support Ricketts's interpretation of 4.22. It seems to indicate, as he suggests, that expressions that are not names can occur in propositions. Yet closer inspection reveals that that is a misreading.

The topic of 4.22 are elementary propositions. It tells us what elementary propositions consist of: names. The topic of 4.24, on the other hand, is not what elementary propositions consist of, but how Wittgenstein writes them. In particular, the part of 4.24 that introduces function

²⁷Wittgenstein Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus p. 36. "Die Namen sind die einfachen Symbole, ich deute sie durch einzelne Buchstaben (»x«, »y«, »z«) an.

Den Elementarsatz schreibe ich als Funktion der Namen in der Form: »fx«, » $\varphi(x, y)$ «, etc.

Oder ich deute ihn durch die Buchstaben p, q, r an." Wittgenstein Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, p. 38.

and relation symbols (f and φ), and which Ricketts takes to lend support his to interpretation of 4.22 to the effect that expressions other than names can occur in elementary propositions, is not about *the way elementary propositions are*, or about what they consist of, but about *the way Wittgenstein writes them*.²⁸

If this is right, we cannot extrapolate, from the way Wittgenstein says that he ‘writes’ or ‘indicates’ propositions and names, to the syntactical categories to which propositions and their constituents belong. The point may seem contrived, but we can see that it isn’t by noting that in the last sentence of 4.24, Wittgenstein says that he (sometimes) indicates propositions by single letters. If the notation introduced in 4.24 is a guide to the fundamental syntactic features of propositions and their constituents, we would then have to conclude from that statement that there are elementary propositions expressible by ‘p,’ ‘q’ and ‘r,’ which are inarticulate. That would surely be a mistake.

Under the reading I am proposing, by writing “I indicate” and “I write,” Wittgenstein indicates that these are notational choices, made in each case for a particular purpose. The choice of writing propositions *as functions*, as fx or $\varphi(x,y)$ serves the purpose of underlining their *form*,

²⁸The partisan of Ricketts’s reading may be tempted to object that there is no difference between what a proposition is and the way in which it is written. This is not true in the context of the discussion of the propositions of an ideal language. In such a context one may draw a distinction between the way a proposition in an ideal language is, and the way one will represent it by a proposition in a different notation that is more convenient for expository purposes.

the *structure* that they share with facts, and the differences between the possibilities that the constituents of the facts that they represent have of entering into combinations with other objects (categorical differences); differences in the *forms* of the *objects* that constitute such propositions. But to say that the relation symbol φ has a different categorical *form* than the individual constant symbol a is not to say that the relation symbol belongs to a syntactical category other than the category 'name.'

Just as in Tractarian ontology there are only facts and things, in the language of the *Tractatus* there are only names and propositions (elementary and logically complex). In Tractarian ontology, form is the possibility of structure [2.033], and the possibilities of combining with other objects and thus of entering into states of affairs is written into objects [2.011]. This means that not all Tractarian objects can combine with all Tractarian objects into states of affairs. The kind of objects that binary relations are cannot combine with other objects of the same kind in a state of affairs. They can only combine with the kind of objects that individuals (in a more pedestrian sense) are, and with two of them. And this is 'written' in the relations themselves.

That relations and individuals have different possibilities of combining with other objects in states of affairs does not imply that they are not Tractarian objects. The Tractarian notion of *object* is neutral with respect to (categorical) form. The same is true at the level of language. Names for relations and names for individuals have different compositional possibil-

ities. They have a different *logical* form. But they are names all the same; tractarian names, which correspond to first order logic non-logical constants. Wittgenstein introduces the functional notation in 4.24 because it conveniently captures differences in combinatorial possibilities between expressions that are Tractarian *names*, not in order to introduce expressions that do not fall into the categories *Tractarian Name*, or *Tractarian Proposition*.

This reading is supported by the fact that immediately after 4.22, Wittgenstein indicates that the thesis that elementary propositions *are* concatenations of names raises an issue about their possibility of combining with one another into sentences:

4.221 It is obvious that the analysis of propositions must bring us to elementary propositions which consist of names in immediate combination.

This raises the question of how such combination into propositions comes about.

There are two important claims contained in this proposition that are relevant to the present discussion. The first is that the combination of names in elementary propositions is immediate. This is relevant because it renders the occurrence of anything other than names in elementary propositions superfluous. Just as the structure of a fact is nothing over and above the objects which are combined in it (since it is determined only by the forms of the objects that constitute the state of affairs), so the

nexus between names in a proposition does not require an extra symbol, one that stands on its own, apart from names.

The second relevant claim is the indication that the immediacy of the connection between names in the proposition raises a question about how that connection comes to be. Wittgenstein's answer is that the connection is brought about by the form of the objects that constitutes the states of affairs, which form is "written" into the objects themselves.

The two claims together support my reading in that part of what the functional notation, which employs names like "f" and " φ " does, is brought forth the articulate character of elementary propositions. There is, I believe, no reason to suppose that Wittgenstein's choice of writing elementary propositions in a way that appeals to a distinction between types of names based on differences between *the forms of the objects* that those names stand for – on their internal possibilities of combining with other objects, on the possibility of the structure of the elementary states of affair that they constitute – is meant to indicate that expressions other than names figure in elementary propositions.

Although Ricketts's reading of 4.24, which supports his reading of 4.22, seems *prima facie* plausible, on closer inspection, a reading of 4.24 according to which the 4.24 is not the introduction of expressions that are not Tractarian names reveals itself to be more plausible, and also more coherent with 4.221, which is a commentary of 4.22 that also lends support to my reading of the latter.

2.2 Textual Evidence: 3.31

3.31 is the other proposition to which Ricketts appeals as evidence for his reading of 4.22, according to which 4.22 does not rule out that there are elementary propositions containing expressions that aren't names. It reads as follows:

3.31 I call any part of a proposition that characterizes its sense an expression (or a symbol).

(A proposition is itself an expression.)

Everything essential to their sense that propositions can have in common with one another is an expression.

An expression is the mark of a form and a content.

Note, first, that even though this proposition effectively introduces the notion of expressions that are not names, it is a remark on propositions *in general*, and not on elementary propositions. Accordingly, it does not give direct support to Ricketts's reading of 4.22.

Ricketts's claim, however, is that "3.31 leads to an understanding of quantification that permits quantification into the position occupied by relational predicates,"²⁹ and this suggests that he does not construe it as giving direct support to his claim, but as supporting his interpretation only insofar as it eventually leads to the possibility of quantifying in the positions of relational terms.

²⁹Ricketts footnote 36, p. 98.

But could such a view of quantification lend support to the reading of 4.22 according to which it does not say that elementary propositions contain *only* names, but rather that it contains names and expressions of other kinds? Trivially, it is possible to quantify in the place occupied by names. Just as trivially, this does not imply, directly or not, that names are not names.³⁰

2.3 Textual Evidence: Objects and Names, Like Links in a Chain...

The Tractarian proposition 2.03, which says that “In a state of affairs objects fit into one another like the links of a chain” is sometimes cited in this context as evidence that there aren’t Tractarian names for relations and that relations are not Tractarian objects. Ricketts writes:

³⁰As Tom Lockhart has pointed out to me, Ricketts must be considering, as readings of 4.22, only the two following options: (1) Propositions consist only of standard (Fregean) names or (2) Propositions consist of Fregean names and expressions of other kinds. If these were the only two options, the second one would seem preferable, and it would be the only consistent one with the possibility of quantifying into the place occupied by relational constants.

The reading I am proposing is one in according to which the point of 4.22 is to stipulate a use of “name” within the *Tractatus* that does not match the standard or Fregean use; one according to which all non-logical constants are names. Such a reading contradicts (1) and is compatible with (2). Accordingly, it is not vulnerable to Ricketts’s argument in favor of (2) over (1) through quantifiability into places occupied by relational constants. This may make it seem as though the difference between Ricketts’s reading (2) and my suggestion were purely terminological: since Ricketts and I agree that Tractarian propositions contain more than Fregean names, what does it matter what we call the other expressions? It matters because the reading of other propositions of the *Tractatus* that appeal to the notion of names depend on this point. In particular, by not calling relational constants namers, Ricketts avoids commitment to the view that relations are Tractarian objects, while the reading I am proposing implies, via 3.22 (“In a proposition a name is the representative of an object.”), that relations are Tractarian objects.

Elementary sentences represent (*darstellen*) atomic facts. An atomic fact is a combination of objects in which the objects are related in a definite way, in which the objects “hang together in each other like the links of a chain” (2.03). In the analogy between atomic facts and chains, Wittgenstein rejects Russell’s view of relations as ontological atoms that have the role of joining other ontological atoms together into complexes.³¹

The appeal to 2.03 is questionable, for the analogy works both ways. It’s just a matter of how many links one thinks the chain as having.

Furthermore, it is surprising that Ricketts uses the analogy as evidence in favor of his view. He himself points to a text in which Wittgenstein uses that same analogy to make precisely the contrary claim.³² The text in question is Wittgenstein’s comment of proposition 2.01 of the *Tractatus* as reported by Desmond Lee’s notes on the 1930-1932 Cambridge lectures:

2.01 “An atomic fact [a state of affairs] is a combination of objects (entities, things)”. Objects etc. is here used for such things as a color, a point in visual space, etc: cf. also above, A word has no sense except in a proposition. “Objects” also include relations; a proposition is not two things connected by a relation. “Thing” and “relation” are on the same level. The objects hang is it were in a chain.³³

Wittgenstein is here pointing out the connection between 2.01 and 4.22: They give expression to structurally identical principles, the former ontological, the latter logical; they indicate structurally identical features of facts and of (elementary) propositions. This fits well with the general structural correspondence that Wittgenstein sets up in the *Tractatus*

³¹Ricketts pp. 75–76.

³²Ricketts Footnote 32., p. 98

³³Wittgenstein Wittgenstein’s Lectures, Cambridge 1930–1932 p. 120

between the ontological and the logical registers. And this structural identity must be in place, at any rate, if it is true that propositions can represent states of affairs by virtue of having names that stand for the components of the states of affairs and by sharing their structure. One of the main disadvantages of Ricketts's reading of 4.22 is that, since it involves both the claim that "a envies b" and similar propositions involve more than just two names, and the claim that the fact that *a* envies *b* and other relational facts involves only two objects, this structural correspondence is lost.

The partisan of Ricketts's reading could challenge the relevance of Wittgenstein's remarks on the *Tractatus* in the early thirties, suspecting that perhaps Wittgenstein changed his mind sometime between its publication and his conversation with Desmond Lee. A quick glance at the notebook entry of the 16th of June of 1915 should dissipate any doubts:

Relations and properties, etc. are *objects* too.³⁴

2.4 Textual Evidence: 3.1432

Within a discussion of the question of relations, consideration of one last piece of textual evidence is mandatory. It is the bit of text that every defender of the view that there aren't Tractarian names for relations inevitably falls back on:

³⁴Wittgenstein Notebooks 1914-1916 (2nd ed.) p. 61e.

3.1432 "Instead of, 'The complex sign " aRb " says that a stands to b in the relation R , we ought to put, 'That " a " stands to " b " in a certain relation says that aRb ."

Once again, a more careful reading of the proposition, and consideration of its textual context, is key to a better understanding of it. The context makes it clear that Wittgenstein's aim is not to warn against using a name for a relation R . In the 3.14s Wittgenstein is introducing the claim that propositional signs are themselves facts, and that it is only because they are facts, and thus because they have structure, that they can express other facts. 3.142 says that facts can express senses, and that names cannot.³⁵ 3.143 draws our attention to the fact that our ordinary form of expression conceals that the propositional sign is a fact.³⁶ The purpose of 3.1432, which is a comment on the latter, is to suggest a way of talking about propositions *without naming* them, without concealing their factual, articulate form by referring to them by means of simple names.

Thus, 3.1432 is the suggestion that instead of saying "The complex sign [the propositional sign] ' aRb ' expresses a certain fact," thereby using a definite description, a name, to refer to the fact in which the propositional sign consists, we say "That ' a ' stands in a certain relation to ' b ' says

³⁵3.142 Only facts can express a sense, a set of names cannot.

³⁶[3.143] Although a propositional sign is a fact, this is obscured by the usual form of expression in writing or print. For in a printed proposition, for example, no essential difference is apparent between a propositional sign and a word. (That is what made it possible for Frege to call a proposition a composite name.)

that aRb."

Wittgenstein's emphasis on the subordinating conjunction "that" corroborates that that is the point of 3.1432: propositions are facts, and thus it is advisable to represent them linguistically in a way that makes their articulate nature salient, rather than to name them by expressions like: "The complex *aRb.*"

The proposition that follows immediately, 3.144, confirms this reading. Its claim is that states of affairs or situations (and this includes the existing states of affairs in which propositional signs consist) can be described (as they are in Wittgenstein's suggested manner of talking about what propositions say) but not *named* (as they are in the manner of speaking which use he recommends against).³⁷

2.5 Relations *are* objects

I have been arguing that there are Tractarian names for relations. This, together with 3.22, the Tractarian proposition that names represent objects, implies that relations are Tractarian objects.

I have argued that 4.22, the Tractarian claim that propositions consist only of names, implies this view. For the only alternative is a reading according to which propositions expressing relational facts consist only of the names of the objects between which the relations hold, but any lan-

³⁷[3.144] Situations can be described but not *given names*.
(Names are like points; propositions like arrows—they have sense.)

guage for which this were the case would be extremely poor in expressive power. I have also considered the possibility of an alternative reading of 4.22, one according to which it would not state that propositions consist only of names, but that propositions consist of names and other expressions. I have rejected that option on textual grounds. In addition, I have considered texts that have sometimes been used as counter-evidence to the interpretation I am proposing, and I have provided what I take to be unequivocal textual evidence in favor of the reading I am suggesting. Wittgenstein says as much: relations are Tractarian objects.

If these considerations are right, then pending an alternative solution to the problem of the inconsistency of the view that there are no Tractarian names for relations with 4.22, it seems like the best available interpretation of the Tractarian doctrine of relations is the one I have been proposing, according to which there *are* Tractarian names for relations and thus, by 3.22, relations are Tractarian objects.

But what, after all, is one affirming when one says that relations are Tractarian objects, what is one thereby denying? The next section is an attempt to lend further plausibility to this reading by attempting to shed some light on the stakes of the claim that relations are Tractarian objects. I will attempt to do this by recalling some of the issues raised by Russell's theory of relations in the *Theory of Knowledge* manuscript of 1913. These considerations will also lead to a more general discussion of Wittgenstein's method in the *Tractatus* and of some of the fundamental Tractarian

insights about the nature and value of metaphysical questions of a certain ilk.

3 Russell and Wittgenstein on Relations

3.1 Russell's Puzzle

In section 2.3, where I discussed the chain analogy of 2.03, I quoted the passage of *Pictures, Logic and the Limits of Sense* in which Ricketts puts forth the claim that the analogy is a rejection of Russell's view of relations as ontological atoms that join together ontological atoms in complex propositions.

That Wittgenstein rejects this view of Russell's is indisputable. But the rejection does not require, as Ricketts suggests, giving up the treatment of relations as objects (or ontological atoms). All that it requires is the distinction drawn in 4.122 between internal or structural relations, which are purely formal, and relations proper (*zwischen den internen Relationen und den eigentlichen Relationen*), which in my reading correspond to Tractarian objects:

4.122 In a certain sense we can talk about formal properties of objects and states of affairs, or, in the case of facts, about structural properties: and in the same sense about formal relations and structural relations.

(Instead of 'structural property' I also say 'internal property'; instead of 'structural relation,' 'internal relation'.

I introduce these expressions in order to indicate the source of the confusion between internal relations and relations proper (external relations), which is very widespread among philosophers.)

It is impossible, however, to assert by means of propositions that such internal properties and relations obtain: rather, this makes itself manifest in the propositions that represent the relevant states of affairs and are concerned with the relevant objects.

Within the context of 4.122, Wittgenstein writes that the purpose of introducing that distinction is precisely to avoid a confusion that is widespread among philosophers. That the philosophers he has on mind are Frege and Russell, and mainly Russell, is strongly suggested by the propositions that precede and follow 4.122. In particular, the mention in proposition 4.1251 of ‘the vexed question of whether all relations are internal or external’ is an unmistakable reference to Russell’s puzzle about asymmetric relations in chapter VII of the 1913 Manuscript for his projected *Theory of Knowledge*. In a Russellian nutshell, Russell’s Puzzle is this:

In a dual complex, the order is introduced by the words or symbols used in naming the complex, and does not exist in the complex itself. Our problem arises from the fact that, although this is the case, a different complex results from interchanging the terms, and that such interchange *looks* like a change of order.³⁸

³⁸Russell, Bertrand *Theory of Knowledge*. The 1913 Manuscript. London and New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 87, ll. 9 – 14.

The problem with which Russell struggles is this. Consider an asymmetric relation Rab . Russell's theory of complexes commits him to the view that form, or order, is not a component of a complex (of a fact³⁹). It also commits him to the view that complexes or facts are nothing over and above their constituents.⁴⁰ Yet since the relation R is asymmetric, " Rab " and " Rba " represent different complexes, even though the complexes they represent contain the same constituents (R , a and b). Thus 'it looks' as though the difference between the facts expressed by " Rab " and by " Rba " came down to a difference in order or form. So it looks as though, contrary to what Russell believes and has argued in previous parts of the manuscript, form or order were internal to the complexes.

3.2 Avoiding Philosophical Confusion: The Distinction Between Internal and External Relations

One of the aims of the first section was to characterize the Tractarian notion of form as the possibility of structure, as an object's internal possibilities of combining with other objects into structured states of affairs. A good grasp of those notions is required for understanding the distinction between internal relations and relations proper introduced by Wittgen-

³⁹"[T]here is certainly a one-to-one correspondence between complexes and facts, and for our present purposes we may assume that they are identical." (Russell, 2002, p.80). Since the difference between complexes and facts is also irrelevant for our purposes, I will use the expressions "fact" and "complex" interchangeably.

⁴⁰"[...] two complexes which involve the same related terms can only differ if the relations differ in the two complexes." (Russell, 2002, p. 54)

stein in 4.122, and which we considered in 3.1. With the results of the first section on mind, we are now in a position to understand how that distinction serves the purpose of avoiding philosophical confusion and of settling Russell's vexing puzzle.

Internal relations are the relations that hold between objects by virtue of their form. Internal relations are also called structural relations because they are, precisely, the relations that hold between objects when they are combined in a structured state of affairs. They are the kind of 'thing' that cannot be named, and whose obtaining cannot be asserted [4.121], [4.122]. The distinction between the notions of internal or structural relations and external relations or relations proper is of particular importance in the context of consideration of relational facts.

In relational states of affairs Rab , a relational object R (an external relation, a relation proper), enters into combination with some other objects a and b . The possibility of such a combination depends on the internal properties of each of the objects, or what is the same, on their form; for those objects to enter into such a combination (like links fit together into a chain) is just for an internal relation to hold between them. In particular, in a relational state of affairs Rab , a relation proper R , an external relation, *an object*, enters into an internal relation (a structure, a nexus, a concatenation) for which there is no name, and which itself is not an object, with the other objects a and b .

Put slightly differently, the possibility of objects combining into states

of affairs is part of the internal properties of those objects, it is internal to them, written on them, it is part of their form. And the possibility that the object that an external relation R is has of entering into an internal relation with objects a and b in the relational state of affairs Rab is not different. It is a possibility internal to the proper relation. It is part of its form: internal relations are part of the form of external relations. *This is Wittgenstein's Tractarian solution to Russell's problem of relations.*

3.3 Russell's Puzzle: A Notational (d)Effect?

I now want to draw attention to three features of this solution related to Russell's own understanding of the Puzzle.

First, note that according to Russell's own characterization of the puzzle, it is the result of a linguistic effect. According to Russell, order is not an intrinsic feature of a relational fact ("it does not exist in the dual complex itself"). Order is a mere notational effect ("it is introduced by the words or symbols used in naming the complex"). Since order is merely a notational effect, a change of order of the terms of a relational expression (e.g. from " aRb " to " bRa ") should have no bearing on the relational fact. Yet "a different complex [or relational fact] results from interchanging the terms." And the fact that "such interchange [deceptively] *looks* like a change of order" (the fact "from which our problem arises") deceives us into identifying the change in relational fact or complex, which has indeed taken place, with what in fact is a mere notational effect: the purely

linguistic and hence merely apparent change in the order of the complex.

More evidence to the effect that Russell considered the view that form is internal to relations to be a mere notational effect can also be found a couple of pages earlier in the manuscript, where he writes:

But whatever method [for expressing relational facts] may be adopted, it remains obvious that the difference between “before” and “after” is purely linguistic: there is no fact (except linguistic facts) which cannot be described without using both words.⁴¹

The presupposition that underlies the idea of notational effects that misrepresent the way things are is that it is possible to distinguish between the way things are and the way they are represented in language.

3.4 Russell’s Razor

The second point of Russell’s way of dealing with the puzzle that is crucial to understanding the nature of Wittgenstein’s solution to it is what I have called Russell’s Razor. This is Russell’s idea that the fact that one of a pair of words used to describe a fact can be eliminated from a language without loss of expressive power is correlated to there being only one fact that those two words refer to within the context of suitably similar sentences.

⁴¹Russell p. 85.

3.5 The View From Yonder

Finally, the passage in 3.3 above also brings us to another feature of Russell's understanding of the puzzle: the idea of the possibility of solving philosophical issues by adopting the point of view of facts instead of the linguistic point of view. That this is Russell's view is suggested by the claim that there is only one fact corresponding to the relations denoted by "before" and "after", but is also manifest in the following two passages:

"Looking away from everything psychological, and considering only the external fact in virtue of which it is true to say that *A* is before *B*, it seems plain that this fact consists of two events *A* and *B* in succession, and that whether we choose to describe it by saying "*A* is before *B*" or by saying "*B* is after *A*" is a mere matter of language."⁴²

"Tempting as such a theory is [namely, the theory that two distinct facts correspond to "*a* is the father of *b*" and "*b* is the son of *a*"], in view of the difficulties which arise from rejecting it [i.e. from Russell's Puzzle], it seems nevertheless so obvious as to be undeniable that, *when we think of what actually takes place rather than of its verbal expression*,⁴³ we cannot find a vestige of the difference between *x* preceding *y* and *y* succeeding *x*."⁴⁴

3.6 Wittgenstein's Resolute Solution

These three features of Russell's construal enable us to single out what is radically different and radically new in Wittgenstein's Tractarian approach to the problem. Wittgenstein certainly shares with Russell the

⁴²Russell p. 85.

⁴³My emphasis.

⁴⁴cite[p. 87.]Russell1913ms

view that the Puzzle is the result of a notational effect and the insight of Russell's razor to the effect that there is a correlation between the eliminability of expressions and (metaphysical) features of the world. Just as certainly, however, he rejects Russell's assumption of the possibility of adopting a point of view from nowhere, a perspective from outside language and outside everything psychological.

These three points together characterize just what Wittgenstein's Tractarian strategy consist of, as opposed to Russell's: stay within the limits of language, and use the eliminability of expressions, the ideal of a language that contains no superfluous expressions, as a standard for determining which claims are about the world and which aren't: [5.6]"*The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*"⁴⁵ Pushing the limits of language to the minimum, devising a notation that contains as few expressions as possible, is the best way of determining what, minimally, 'can be said' about the world.

In the first section of this paper I insisted on the fact that Wittgenstein's ontology is modeled on language. Now we have come full circle, and are in a position to appreciate how this is consistent with limiting oneself to considering the world from the point of view of language, and the extent to which this is true of the Tractarian doctrine of relations. That relations are objects is just a consequence, within the *Tractatus*, of the indispensability of relational terms in a an ideal notation that is not inferior in

⁴⁵Wittgenstein *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* p. 68.

expressive power to natural language. That to each relation corresponds only one object is the consequence of the dispensability of more than one name for a single relation. That the fact that " aRb " and that bRa (where R is asymmetric) say different things even though they are constituted by the same objects is not puzzling because like the facts they represent, " aRb " and " bRa " have different forms. Each of their constituents have the same form, but the structure of each propositional symbol and of each of the facts they represent, their internal or structural relations, differ.

Thus the question of symmetry that so vexed Russell in the 1913 Manuscript is taken care of by adopting a solution opposite to Russell's. Where for Russell order is external to relations, for Wittgenstein it is internal. Yet saying, like Russell did, that it is external, would require adopting an external point of view. For Wittgenstein, once language is pushed to its minimal limits by applying Occam's razor, there is no attempting to circumvent linguistic effects. They are no longer *mere* effects, because there is no standard beyond those effects against which to assess their adequacy.

Concluding Remarks: Is the Tractarian Doctrine of Relations an Oxymoron? Resolutely Not

Our departing point was the relations dilemma RD concerning alternative readings of the *Tractatus*, and in particular, of 4.22, the claim that propo-

sitions consist of names and are concatenations of names. The most natural reading of this proposition leads to the view that relational terms are included in the Tractarian syntactic category of names. Yet this view, coupled with 3.22, the proposition that names represent objects, leads to the view that relations are Tractarian objects. This has the drawback of committing us to a reading of the Tractatus according to which its ontology is bloated and coarse-grained, and for some, in particular for some brought up in a Fregean tradition, such an ontology is considerably counterintuitive. The alternative, however, is an ultimately untenable reading of the Tractatus according to which relational facts are given expression by concatenations of names that do not contain relational expressions.

The first section was an excursion into the first propositions of the Tractatus. The aim was to get Tractarian ontology, some aspects of the pictorial theory of representation, and the conception of proposition into view. One of the results of this section was that Tractarian ontology is informed through and through by the linguistic model that Wittgenstein takes as a point of departure. As a consequence, the notions of fact and of states of affairs play a primitive role within Tractarian ontology, and the working conception of object is determined through and through by the notion of fact, and by the idea of 'that which can be a component of a fact.' In other words, within Tractarian economy, the notion of object contains exactly as much as it ought to contain to make sense of the idea that objects enter into combinations with other objects in order to

constitute states of affairs. This, we saw, required introduction the notion of form as the possibility of structural combination into states of affairs that is inherent to objects.

In the second section we explored the claim that relations are not objects by asking whether the view that there are no Tractarian names for relations leaves room for the expressibility of relational facts. Within this context, we considered Ricketts's strategy for dealing with that problem. The result of this section, which involved close scrutiny of textual evidence, was that a reading according to which there are names for relations, and consequently, by 3.22, according to which relations are objects, seems to be the most plausible.

The third section consisted in a presentation of Russell's problem of asymmetric relations and of his diagnosis of this problem, followed by a presentation of Wittgenstein's solution to the problem, and some remarks about Wittgenstein's and Russell's strategies for dealing with philosophical problems, with emphasis on the intra-linguistic point of view adopted by the former in the *Tractatus*.⁴⁶

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⁴⁶I would like to insist that the claims in the third section are not to be taken as claims about who influenced whom. This would require careful consideration of the development of Wittgenstein and Russell's views of relations in the 1910s, and that is another story, to be told another time.

Throughout the paper I have freely referred to Wittgenstein's view of relations, to his answer to the question of whether relations are Tractarian objects, and have even spoken about the Tractarian doctrine of relations. In the last section, I introduced the theme of the limits of language, and even claimed that the Tractarian Doctrine of relations is the result of looking at language from within language and using the idea of a minimalist ideal notation, an ideal notation containing all and only the expressions that are necessary to express everything that is the case, and nothing more, as a criterion to determine what our ontology should be like. At this stage, the reader should be wondering: What about nonsense? Isn't the phrase: "Tractarian Doctrine of Relations" an oxymoron?

The answer is: resolutely not. The phrase refers to the doctrine of relations to be found *in* the *Tractatus*, not to 'the' (ineffable) doctrine of relations that an irresolute Wittgenstein might have attempted to indirectly communicate to his readers through substantively nonsensical syntactically flawed constructions. *That* is an oxymoron, an oxymoronic sequence of oxymorons.

The doctrine of relations that the phrase "Tractarian Doctrine of Relations" alludes to is a doctrinal rung of the Tractarian ladder, where "doctrinal rung" means a doctrine of the kind that the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus* encourages us, his readers, to entertain, in order that we are able, eventually, to see them fall apart from within the *Tractatus*.

One consequence of adopting the point of view of language, and realizing that there is no view of the world from outside language, is the one that I have been insisting upon: That whatever we take our ontology to be like is determined by our language, and accordingly, that a minimal ideal language that can express everything that is the case sets the standards for what there is: Occam's razor cuts deep through ontology. This is the upshot of 'adopting the point of view of language.'

Yet Occam's razor has a double edged blade. If language determines metaphysics, and if there are alternative possible languages between which one ought to choose, then the very idea of a describable metaphysical realm that one can get right or wrong when making particular ontological claims, such as the claim that relations are objects, simply drops out of the picture. If metaphysical matters are linguistic-framework dependent, then they are not matters of fact. Accordingly, metaphysical propositions are not about any thing. Not at all.

Thus, even though relations *are* Tractarian objects, the lesson to be drawn from the Tractatus, once we have climbed through the remaining rungs of the Tractarian ladder, is that the dilemma itself is to be rejected. The question about the ontological status of relations is the kind of question that does not have an answer, there is no fact of the matter that determines which answer is right. As with other questions of that kind, the question about the ontological status of relations and other ontological questions (Are concepts objects? Are numbers objects?) can only seem

urgent and to have an answer to someone who entertains the possibility of adopting a perspective from outside language and thought in order to fix the limits of language and to determine whether its structure corresponds to the structure of things themselves.⁴⁷ Even though there is such a thing as a Tractarian doctrine of relations, one that has content, and one that involves claims such as the claim that relations are objects, that they are part of the substance of the world, etc., such a doctrine, as all Tractarian doctrines, are only rungs in the Tractarian ladder, to be resolutely kicked away once the book has been understood.

Is there a *Tractarian* doctrine of relations? Sure... Are relations *Tractarian* objects? Sure... Are relations – objects? ... Nonsense!

⁴⁷Russell was not alone in holding this kind of position. Frege, for instance, also held this view: Cf. Frege, Gottlob Boole's Logical Calculus and the Concept-script. In Posthumous Writings. Blackwell, 1979 p. 12, ll. 18–19.

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